BIG GAME RANCHING DISCUSSION PAPER

OCTOBER 30, 1984

Alberta

PUBLIC LANDS AND WILDLIFE

Office of the Associate Minister

408 Legislature Building, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5K 2B6 403/427-3674

October 30, 1984

Dear Sir or Madam:

The attached discussion paper on Big Game Ranching outlines a proposal by the Alberta Government to allow the ranching of big game animals for the commercial sale of meat for public consumption. The paper provides background information concerning the game ranching movement and explains why a game ranching industry could be beneficial to Albertans.

Of paramount importance is the continued protection and conservation of free-ranging populations of native wildlife that are so highly regarded by Albertans. Game ranching is acceptable in Alberta only if native wildlife are protected from any possible adverse effects or exploitation by commercial interests. We believe that the recommendations in this document provide that kind of stringent protection. Especially important are recommendations that would prohibit game ranching on public land, prevent illegally obtained products from entering the legalized commercial system, and that would prohibit hunting on big game ranches.

We are pleased to submit this discussion document for your review. We hope that you will give it your careful and objective consideration, as we have done during its development over the last few months. Written comments are welcome and should be directed to Mr. Dennis Surrendi, Assistant Deputy Minister, Fish and Wildlife Division, Main Floor, North Tower, Petroleum Plaza, 9945 - 108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 2C9. Please ensure that your submissions are sent to Mr. Surrendi by December 15, 1984.

Yours truly,

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INTRODUCTION

In an historical context, the primary role of the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division has been the protection and management of free-ranging wildlife. This role continues to reflect the large recreational clientele who pursue and otherwise enjoy the wildlife resource in a wild and free ranging state. It also recognizes fish and wildlife as natural and renewable resources having economic values exceeding $200 million annually in Alberta in the form of both consumptive and non-consumptive industries.

Present legislation does not recognize all of the situations where animals are commonly held in captivity and does not differentiate between Alberta's native wildlife and exotic animals that are not found here in a wild or free state, but which someone may wish to import (e.g. budgies, lions, etc). These shortcomings have created a situation today where many common uses of captive animals are beyond the scope of current legislation. For example, present legislation does not provide for the holding of wildlife in Zoos or educational institutions (i.e. schools, colleges, universities) and does not recognize that certain wildlife species (e.g. gophers, frogs, etc) are commonly held as pets.

The 1970's witnessed an increasing interest in wildlife as a captive commodity, as a source of high protein red meat, and as a source of a variety of products, including taxidermized materials, therapeutic and medicinal treatments and items of cultural value.

The raising of big game animals for commercial purposes is common in many parts of the world and has been practiced in Alberta in the form of game farming for more than two decades. Current legislation in Alberta recognizes the legitimacy of raising wildlife for sale, gain or profit.

The Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta recognizes legitimate commercial opportunities and the potential role that Albertans can play in meeting global demands for the products of captive wildlife industries within the framework of a high standard of wildlife management. It is also recognized that the present legislative framework requires revision if these commercial opportunities are to be pursued. Moreover, a number of issues concerning wildlife and "exotic animals" (i.e. animals not found in a wild or free state in Alberta) in captivity require examination.

This paper outlines the opportunities associated with game ranching and the requirements that would be necessary to create an environment that would encourage a game ranching industry, while at the same time protect the native wildlife resources of the Province for the enjoyment of all Albertans.

BIG GAME RANCHING

Big Game Ranching is the raising of big game for the production of red meat and other products for public consumption or use. Big Game Ranching does not presently occur in Alberta, but opportunities exist which would enable Alberta to take advantage of strong worldwide markets for big game meat and products.

The New Zealand experience may be useful in understanding the industry as it exists in the world today.

New Zealand was one of the first nations outside of the Orient to develop a major deer and elk ranching industry. A variety of products emanate from New Zealand game ranches, but meat and antlers are the mainstay of the industry.

The following information provides some appreciation of the scope of the New Zealand game ranching industry:

i. Since 1969, when game ranching legislation was passed, about 2,400 game ranches have come into existence.
ii. 300,000 elk are held in captivity on ranches.
iii. 10 elk and deer slaughter plants are in operation or under construction.
iv. 2,000-3,000 tons of meat valued at $16-25,000,000.00 are exported annually.

v. Annual exports of velvet antlers are worth about $10,000,000.00.

Alberta, like New Zealand, is geographically well suited to the raising of large ungulates in captivity. The temperate climate and available land base contribute to the feasibility of this kind of commercial activity.

Existing legislation in Alberta allows the keeping of big game in captivity for public and private viewing and the sale of live animals, but does not allow the sale of meat. A viable Big Game Ranching industry could develop in Alberta if permitted to do so.

Economic advantages of game ranching to Alberta would be many and varied but would include the following:

i. Big Game Ranching is a viable alternative for use of Treaty Indian and Metis lands. Huge areas of land located within the boundaries of Indian Reserves and Metis Settlements are more suited to wildlife production than to conventional forms of agriculture. With proper management, most Indian Reserves and Metis Settlements can produce enough big game to satisfy the annual red meat requirements of the entire settlement. This would reduce the necessity for Treaty Indian hunters to travel long distances to obtain subsistence big game. Additional benefits to the people on Indian Reserves and Metis Settlements could include:

   a) Employment.

   b) Income from sale of Big Game Ranched livestock.

c) Income from sale of export products, such as velvet antlers.

d) Income from sale of arts and crafts made from game ranched wildlife products.

e) Income from red meat sales.

f) Park-like amenities, such as picnic areas, cross-country ski trails and hiking trails and the associated economic benefits to these settlements.

ii. Big Game Ranching is an industry suited to the rural setting of much of Alberta. The industry would add to the rural economy through creation of employment opportunities and added tax base.

iii. Consumers of Alberta would benefit from Big Game Ranching through the opportunity to select from a variety of meats for consumption as well as a wide range of by-products.

iv. Agriculturalists in Alberta would be able to diversify into new areas of production. Many farmers in Alberta reside on marginal agricultural land. Marginal lands are often better suited to raising native large herbivores (e.g. elk, deer, etc.) rather than domestic livestock.

v. Conversion rates of wild ungulates are favourable. Unimproved pasture can support 10 times more when grazed by native ungulates versus domestic cattle. In New Zealand, gross profit per acre for ranched elk is $1,340.00, compared to $520.00 for domestic cattle and $120.00 for domestic sheep.

vi. Alberta could become a leader in the Big Game Ranching movement in Canada. Strong international markets exist for products of Big Game Ranches.

Big Game Ranching is not a threat to native populations of wild game in Alberta. Adequate safeguards can be build into the system to prevent illegally obained products of wild stock from entering the legalized commercial system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As stated in the Fish and Wildlife Policy of October 1982, the Alberta Government will foster the development of a wildlife ranching industry on private land and land legislated under the Metis Betterment Act. Within this policy direction, Treaty Indian lands are considered as private lands.

2. Big Game Ranching can take place within the Wildlife Act legislative framework accountable to the Associate Minister of Public Lands and Wildlife whose mandate includes the protection, management and conservation of wildlife populations. The commercial aspects of Big Game Ranching should be administered under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Agriculture whose responsibilities include marketing, consumer protection, and extension of commercial agricultural products in the interests of the industry.

3. A Big Game Ranch permit should be established for the keeping of big game animals for profit or gain through the controlled sale of live animals and animal products, including meat for public consumption.

4. Big Game Ranching should be authorized only on privately owned land, Metis Settlement land or Indian Reserve land.

5. The hunting for recreation or profit of any animal should be prohibited in all captive wildlife situations, including Big Game Ranches.

6. The following allowable uses should be considered for big game on a Big Game Ranch in Alberta:

   a. Public or private viewing.

   b. Sale of live animals.

   c. Sale of parts of animals or products, such as velvet antlers, cast antlers, hides, semen, taxidermized items, etc.

   d. Commercial photography.

   e. Sale of meat.

7. Perimeter fencing should be adequate to prevent accidental movement of animals into or out of a Big Game Ranch. A development plan that includes fencing should be required for approval by the Minister and adhered to as a condition of permit renewal.

8. Alberta Agriculture should play a major role in the administration and development of big game ranches, including disease control, marketing, etc.

9. Big Game Ranches should be able to keep any Big Game species that is native to Alberta. No animals classified as a "restricted exotic" would be allowed on Big Game Ranches.

10. Big Game Ranches should be able to sell animals as livestock in Alberta to other authorized Big Game Ranches, Big Game Farms, Zoos, holders of permits for Educational or Scientific Purposes, or buyers outside of Alberta.

11. Any person or company that buys big game products from a big game rancher for resale, should be licensed in Alberta.

12. Parts of Big Game Ranched animals should be marked by the producer, prior to sale, with an appropriate government approved tag or stamp.

13. Removal of velvet antlers, or any other part of a living animal, should be done in a manner that is humane.

14. The Livestock and Livestock Products Act and the Artificial Insemination Act should be amended by Alberta Agriculture to include species of wildlife that could be commercially ranched.

15. Humane treatment of Big Game Ranched animals will be regulated by the Animal Protection Act.

16. An import permit will be required and the various agricultural related requirements will apply when animals are imported into the Province for the purpose of Game Ranching.

17. All shipping documentation required for intraprovincial, interprovincial, and international movement of livestock will apply. Animals should be available for inspection by the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division at any location in Alberta.

18. An export permit will be required when game ranched animals are exported from the Province.

19. Transport of Big Game in Alberta should be regulated by the Livestock Brand Inspection Act and Livestock Brand Inspection Regulations, and Fish and Wildlife Officers should be authorized to enforce the regulations as they pertain to big game species that are game ranched.

20. Big Game Ranches should be able to obtain livestock by purchase or trade from all legal sources within Alberta or from abroad.

21. Big Game Ranch operators that sell meat of game ranched big game must comply with records requirements and health standards dictated by Agriculture Departments of both levels of government and, where necessary, records requirements under the Wildlife Act.

22. Any person who re-sells wild meat will be required to demonstrate, when requested, that he obtained the meat legally from an authorized Big Game Ranch.

23. Big Game Ranch animals or parts may be sold to private individuals. The animal must be slaughtered before leaving the ranch and a bill of sale must accompany the carcass or parts as proof that the animal originated from privately owned stock on a Big Game Ranch.

24. Where animals are kept on a Big Game Ranch for commercial purposes records must be maintained in a manner acceptable under the Wildlife Act.

25. Ownership of a game ranched animal would transfer to the big game rancher at the time of registration.

26. Big Game Ranches should be able to obtain from the wild and under a permit issued under the Wildlife Act up to six (6) animals of a species, once only, as initial breeding stock, provided they are not available from the private sector and they are surplus to the needs of the Crown. In the long term it is foreseen that all breeding stock requirements would be met from other privately owned animals.